

BOARD OF GOVERNORS

Minutes of the meeting held on 17 January 2022

Present

Clive Edwards	Independent member	Chair of the Board
Helen Smallbone		Clerk to the Board
John Cater	Ex-Officio	Vice-Chancellor
Graeme Collinge	Independent member	
Christine Donnelly	Independent member	
Clive Elliott	Independent member	
Amanda Fulford	Teaching staff member	Elected/Co-opted
Lisa Greenhalgh	Independent member	Chair: Audit Committee
Jane Moore	Academic Board nominee	
Rhiannon Muise	Student member	
Jo Nettleton	Independent member	
Louise Robinson	Independent member	
Mike Rush	Independent member	
Mike Tate	Independent member	

In attendance

Mark Allanson	Pro Vice-Chancellor (External Relations)	
Simon Bolton	Associate Dean (Enterprise & Employability)	<i>Attended for item BG.21.067</i>
Lynda Brady	Pro Vice-Chancellor (Student Experience) & University Secretary	
Steve Igoe	Deputy Vice-Chancellor	
Paul Malone	Chief Executive, EHSU	

Apologies

Julian Bucknall	Independent member
Chloe Moran	Student member

BG.21.067 Presentations

Following a request from governors, presentations were given on:

- i. **Graduate Outcomes**, delivered by Mark Allanson, Pro Vice-Chancellor (External Relations).
- ii. **Working with business**, delivered by Professor Simon Bolton, Associate Dean (Enterprise & Employability).

Both presentations are held in the Convene document library. A detailed question and answer session followed, during which governors tested and received assurance about

- student progress to highly skilled employment and further study
- performance in respect of students with protected characteristics
- placement opportunities on non-vocational programmes
- relationships with key local employers
- support for SMEs and future enterprise opportunities
- links with research council initiatives and projects.

Members expressed their thanks to the presenters, noting the discussion had provided the Board with confidence in the University's action, performance and plans regarding the delivery of positive employment opportunities for students and engagement with employers.

In response to a suggestion from a governor, the Clerk agreed to **circulate promotional videos produced by the Productivity and Innovation Centre** to give governors greater insight into its work.

Action: Clerk

BG.21.068 Declarations of Interest

There were no Declarations of Interest.

BG.21.069 Chair's announcements

.01 Board membership

Following an election, Andy Jackson (Facilities Management), has been nominated to the Board by support staff, subject to the Board's approval. A summary of Andy's profile and experience was provided. It was confirmed that the election was held in line with the agreed process and that the relevant checks were undertaken regarding Fit and Proper Person requirements. Members confirmed the appointment and looked forward to welcoming Andy to his first meeting in February.

.02 Honorary awards

The Honorary Awards Committee is seeking nominations for future awards. Governors were encouraged to submit nominations and advised that **further information on previous awards and the nominations process** would be circulated by the Clerk.

Action: Clerk

BG.21.070 Chair's Action

There was no Chair's Action to report.

BG.21.071 Minutes of the previous meeting

Received: Document BG/051/21

The minutes of the meeting held on 15 November 2021 were agreed as an accurate record.

BG.21.072 Action Log

Received: Document BG/052/21

.01 Addressing and preventing harassment and sexual misconduct – staff training

The Deputy Vice-Chancellor (DVC) updated the Board on arrangements for staff training in relation to addressing and preventing harassment and sexual misconduct. He highlighted positive

engagement from staff, particularly those in front-line services including Facilities Management. He also noted the success of a session recently delivered by the rape and sexual abuse support organisation RASA.

All other items were noted as complete or in progress.

The Action Log was received.

BG.21.073 Matters arising not included elsewhere on the agenda

Reported: .01 EHU/WLBC Forum

The Chair noted that the Terms of Reference for the EHU/WLBC forum had not been updated recently and that he would work with the Executive team and WLBC to **ensure that the group's remit remained fit for purpose** in light of contemporary needs.

Action: Chair

SECTION A ITEMS

BG.21.074 Vice-Chancellor's Report

Received: Document BG/053/21

Reported: The Vice-Chancellor introduced the report, drawing attention to the continued delay in the publication of a range of higher education policy documents. This report therefore focused on the University's immediate concerns, namely student recruitment, retention and experience.

Discussed: In response to questions, the following information was noted:

- *Application rates*

A report in the Guardian last year indicated that there were record application numbers to the sector in 2021. Whilst this was true of applications from 18-year-olds, the overall student population had not increased. At present there is an 8% decline in applications for this round. This trend has been reflected in a decrease in applications to the University during the early part of the cycle, though figures were

improving. Recruitment, and in turn conversion, would remain a key strategic focus in the coming weeks.

- *Retention*

In terms of the latest available data, we sit above the sector norm for retaining students though had experienced an increase in withdrawals in the early part of this cycle. The University maintains a relentless focus on ensuring that the quality of our learning and living environments and support services ensure that students stay and succeed. Withdrawals have reduced in recent weeks which may suggest the early data was a result of better reporting arrangements rather than an increase in withdrawals; however, this can only be confirmed once the year is complete.

- *Impact of coronavirus and student satisfaction*

The University is proud to continue providing students with the face-to-face experience they expect and deserve, supplemented by high-quality digital resources. Despite the additional measures in place due to the Omicron variant, the University is confident that students' academic experience has been protected.

In terms of student satisfaction, the recent internal Student Voice Survey was generally very positive. If this were to be repeated in the National Student Survey then the results would be likely to improve on 2021.

- *Two-year/ accelerated degrees*

The University was alert to the possibilities offered by non-traditional degree routes. However, at present the University's strategic focus was on delivering high quality three-year degrees as part of a campus-based experience.

Reflecting on the increased prominence of alternative degree routes in media and government discussions, governors were keen to further discuss alternative models of delivery, supported by empirical analysis. It was agreed that the **Strategy and Development Day scheduled for May would be the appropriate forum for this.**

Action: Clerk

- *Academic Partnerships*

The Vice-Chancellor outlined a number of high-quality, long-term partnerships which allowed students to access EHU education at a more convenient location. This included education provision at Holy Cross College in Bury and provision delivered at locations in Wigan, Manchester and Liverpool. Members noted ongoing discussions amongst the Executive team to invest further in outreach work and academic partnerships.

The Vice-Chancellor provided assurance that the University operated a sound risk-based approach to assessing potential academic partners and would not seek to expand without a solid evidence base of the quality of a partner.

- Resolved:*
- i. To receive the Vice-Chancellor's Report.
 - ii. To discuss alternative degree routes at the Strategy and Development Day.

BG.21.075 Student Report

Received: Document BG/054/21

Reported: The Students' Union (SU) nominee introduced the report drawing particular attention to the campaign work noted and increased engagement across networks.

Discussed: In response to questions, the following information was noted:

- *Engagement with the Students' Union*

All EHU students have membership of the SU but activation of their EHSU account is not a requirement. The SU had worked with the University's Enrolment team to increase the visibility of the activation process and the facilities available at the SU.

- *SU Communications*

The SU's new systems enabled them to introduce greater segmentation to their communications, ensuring that students received messages which were relevant to them and their interests. While the SU hoped this significantly broadened its reach, analysis of participation by protected characteristics was not possible due to the nature of its data sharing agreement with the University.

- *Diversity in faculties*

The Academic Board nominee, who has institutional responsibility for EDI as part of her management role, welcomed the SU's work to support diversity. She outlined the role of the University's EDI Steering Group, its action plan, and workstreams, and offered to meet with the SU representative to enable a collaborative approach, which was welcomed by the SU.

Governors thanked the SU representative for her engaging report.

Resolved: To receive the Student Report.

BG.21.076 Office for Students Update: Reportable Events

Received: Document BG/055/21

Reported: The Clerk introduced the report noting that updated regulatory guidance on Reportable Events required the University to review its approach to ensure our reporting procedure was agile, and proportionate to the new guidelines. She stressed that whilst the guidance recognised that governing bodies may delegate assessment of reportability, it also requires governing bodies to maintain appropriate oversight of reporting. A new process to reflect this would be presented to the Audit Committee for consideration in February. In the meantime, the University's existing policy provided appropriate cover.

Discussed: In response to questions, the following information was noted:

- *Volume of activity*

In the past three years the University has had cause to report only one event. This is partly because there has been no activity which warranted a report; but also because during the past two years the OfS had narrowed their reporting requirements to enable providers to deal with the pandemic.

- *Reporting to the Board*

The proposed new process for considering potentially reportable events would not significantly impact on the Board's business as the assessment of reportability had been delegated to the Vice-Chancellor, and this remained appropriate. Governors would be made aware of

reported events both at their next scheduled meeting, and through the existing reports to the Audit Committee which will also consider items that have not been reported, but which were assessed for reportability. Full records would be held of the University's ongoing assessment activity and would be shared with governors as appropriate to enable the Board to feel assured of robust practice.

- *Interpretation of guidance*

There is latitude within the guidance for universities to make their own judgements about the reportability of a matter. However, the Regulator would consider over- or under-reporting to be an indicator of poor governance. The Vice-Chancellor and Clerk assured members that the University's processes would enable all relevant cases to be identified and carefully considered on their individual merits.

In conclusion, members noted the requirement for candour, transparency and proportionality in our reporting of any issues, though agreed the University's priority must be to continue to operate in a way which means limited issues arise in the first instance.

Resolved: To receive the OfS Update: Reportable Events.

SECTION B ITEMS

BG.21.077 Economic and Social Contribution Report

Received: Document BG/056/21

Reported: The DVC introduced the report, which was originally scheduled for spring 2020 but which was delayed by the pandemic. He advised that he had commissioned an updated report, which **would be returned to the Board on completion** and which would become a feature of the University's corporate publications. The new version will include the University's civic role during the pandemic, its value in relation to community wealth generation, and the anticipated REF outcomes.

Action: DVC

Discussed: In response to questions, the following information was noted:

- *Part time students*

The University's part-time student population had been affected by a reorientation of our strategy following the end of contracts for teacher training development. This reduction in part-time study also reflected national trends; there was a 50% decline in part-time students between 2009 and 2019.

- *Research Institutes*

The 2022 report would reflect all aspects of the University's activities and incorporate outputs from all its research institutes and groups. This would include recent work on sustainability by the SustainNET group.

- *Reflection of economic benefits*

Governors were keen for the next iteration of the report to stress the University's economic benefit to the community, including the value of its skills generation. The DVC confirmed that the consultants engaged to create the next report had been asked to look at multiplier effects.

- *Presentational points*

The DVC noted the importance of accurately conveying the University's contemporary culture and strategy through all aspects of the report and advised that the presentation of the 2022 report would be entirely refreshed, including all graphics, content and references.

Resolved:

- To receive the Economic and Social Contribution report.
- To add the 2022 update to a Board of Governors agenda in the summer term.

BG.21.078 Finance: Management Information

Received: Document BG/057/21

Reported: The DVC presented the early management accounts, indicating that whilst there remained cost sensitivities associated with tuition fee income, the University was on course for a positive year with an expectation that, whilst we might be down on budget, we will generate a substantial surplus and strong cash position.

Discussed: In response to questions it was noted that:

- Tuition fee income was running below budget, though given a significant January intake it was anticipated that income would be broadly in line with the budget by year-end.
- Income from both student accommodation and catering was down on budget. The DVC noted that the first aspect was predicted due to a decision in the summer to remove certain facilities from the University's accommodation portfolio. The reduction in catering spend reflected lower levels of on-campus activity due to the pandemic, though the DVC was optimistic that this would improve as circumstances normalised.
- The University was benefitting from significant gap savings thanks to the return to budget of a full complement of staff. However, infrastructure costs are over budget in part because of works on residential developments which have been costed this year, and also because of in-year approval for refurbishment and maintenance works.
- Spend on maintenance and refurbishment was recorded as an overspend since this had not been fixed in the original budget. The University's approach being to present individual requests to the Board, where relevant, in view of the contemporary financial position. The DVC reminded members that further capital and maintenance projects would be presented to the Board for approval in the spring and noted a list of projects that he was minded to support to improve facilities.
- The change in the University's assets reflected the status of the Back Halls accommodation which was no longer in use.

Resolved: To note the Finance: Management Information report.

BG.21.079 Students' Union: Audited Accounts

Received: Document BG/058/21

Reported: The Chief Executive of the Students' Union (CESU) introduced the SU's Financial Statements. He noted it had been another challenging year for the organisation, but they had adapted to the circumstances as best they could. Commercial assets, including the SU bar, takeaway and Subway franchise, had suffered due to pandemic restrictions. However, tight financial controls had allowed the SU to avert worst-case financial scenarios and the outcome was significantly better than anticipated.

Discussed: The CESU outlined ways in which the SU had adapted to its circumstances, finding opportunities to review its communications, enhance its infrastructure and provide new delivery services.

In summary, the CESU noted that the SU had finished the year in a financially strong position when compared with original assumptions, despite a small deficit.

Resolved: To note the Students' Union: Audited Accounts.

BG.21.080 Academic Board: Summary Report

Received: Document BG/059/21

Reported: The Vice-Chancellor summarised the update from the Academic Board's meeting held in December 2021.

Discussed: Governors noted in particular:

- Positive feedback from the recent Ofsted inspection of Apprenticeship provision
- Assurance that the University's awards in 2020/21 were made in accordance with the appropriate academic regulations. Whilst the University had, in line with regulatory guidance, adopted temporary provisions to mitigate the impacts of the pandemic, the impact was minimal, and the Academic Board was confident that all awards made in 2021 were reliable
- A full Academic Assurance Report would be considered by the Governing Body in February.

Resolved: To **note the Academic Board: Summary Report** and the Board's **continued confidence in the University's academic governance.**

BG.21.81 Any other business

.01 Meeting Forum – February

The Chair noted that at its meeting in September, the Board determined to hold February's meeting virtually given it was anticipated that there would have been a full day strategy and development session held in January. Given the strategy session had been deferred due to pandemic restrictions, the Chair proposed that February's meeting should take place on campus.

SECTION C ITEMS

The following items were received for information:

BG.21.082 Summary Report: Governance & Nominations Committee (1 December 2021) (*Document BG/060/21*).

BG.21.083 Statement of Primary Responsibilities 2021/22 (*Document BG/061/21*).

BG.20.084 Date and time of next meeting

The next meeting is scheduled for 17:30 21 February 2022.